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A POPE-PHILOSOPHER OF THE TENTH CENTURY: SYLVESTER II (GERBERT OF AURILLAC)

In otio, in negotio, et docemus quod scimus, et addiscimus quod nescimus. GERBERT, *Epist.* 44.

Historians both ecclesiastical and secular are agreed in calling the thousand years that extend from the ruin of the Roman Empire in the West (A. D. 476) to its final extinction in the East by the fall of Constantinople (A. D. 1453) as the Middle Ages—the bridge that spans the chasm between the ancient and modern world. It was a transition period, when old institutions were being swept away and the new were still in the making; when every decade brought fresh bands of freebooters, who marked their passage with a trail of blood and fire. Then Christianity was slowly leavening and civilizing the new races, which had overthrown the effete imperial régime; then the nations of modern Europe were being gradually moulded and differentiated; then feudalism and chivalry contended with kingly despotism; little by little Parliaments were born, and the world gravitated slowly but surely to the respect for individual lives and rights, to the political liberties, the constitutional and democratic forms of government, under which we live to-day. In the Roman Empire of pagan times, before Christianity had become a *religio licita*, the State overshadowed all, the individual was of no account. And the Head of the State, in whom the majesty of the People-King was considered to reside, did not delay his apotheosis until death. While still in the flesh and daily parading his infamies before an astounded world, a Caligula or Domitian¹ could and did lay claim to divine honours.

But if the Barbarians, Huns, Goths, Vandals or Norsemen purged the world of such insanities and abominations, they had vices of their own, enough and to spare, to make their history lurid reading. The Merovingians, Christians though they were, were not many degrees better than Commodus or Heliogabalus. Messalina or Agrippina need not blush before Brunhilda or Fre-

¹ Domitian (A. D. 81-96) headed his edicts with the inscription: Dominus et Deus noster hoc fieri jubet. Suet. Domitian, 13.

degonda. The robber barons of the Loire or of the Rhine, the Frangipani and Crescentii of Italy, the Norman dukes and English kings, who pulled teeth from wealthy Jews, or crushed refractory archdeacons under copes of lead, were no less cruel and treacherous than Indian savages. In spite then of the purifying and softening power of Christianity, in spite of ban and interdict against atrocious offenses, in spite of the churches, monasteries and schools that arose on every side, the barbarians were hard to tame, and the latent ferocity of their nature needed only the tempting opportunity to show itself.

Now of the Middle Ages the tenth century is generally regarded the darkest. Cardinal Baronius commences his history of it with these words: "A new century begins, which from its cruelty and lack of virtue is usually called iron, from the ugliness of its exuberant vice, leaden, and from its dearth of writers, dark."²

The great Popes were dead, their worthy successors had not yet arisen, Gregory, First and greatest of the name, no longer sent missionaries to distant England from his cloister on the Aventine; Nicholas, also deservedly called the Great, was now at rest, freed at last from the persecution of licentious kings and usurping prelates; Leo III no longer crowned Roman Emperors in St. Peter's; Kaiser Charles, Leo's protégé and protector, slept in peace at Aachen, his long career of victory and magnificence over. Another Gregory, seventh of the name, had still to come to sweep away inveterate abuses, to withstand wicked kings, and then to die in exile because he loved the truth.³

² Novum inchoatur seculum, quod sui asperitate ac boni sterilitate ferreum, malique exundantis difformitate plumbeum, atque inopia scriptorum appellari consuevit obscurum. *Ann. Eccles.* ad ann. 900

HERGENROTHER'S estimate is similar. *Hist. de l'Eglise*, vol. iii, p. 229 (French Edition). Still it is only fair to add that other writers of note do not subscribe to this opinion. The great Leibnitz (*Introd. in Scrip. Rerum Brunsvic.*) regards the 10th century, at least in Germany, as a "golden age" compared with the 13th. GUIZOT and HALLAM consider the 7th century as low water mark of the human intellect. W. P. KERR voices the same sentiment in his *Dark Ages*. But again on the other hand CHARLES in *Roger Bacon* considers it generally agreed that the 13th century is the "golden age" of the middle ages; and our distinguished contemporary, DR. WALSH, regards the 13th as the "greatest of the centuries." On delicate points of literary and historical criticism unanimity will, no doubt, never be attained.

³ Gregory VII (1073-1085) on the point of expiring exclaimed: *Dilexi iustitiam et odi iniquitatem, propterea morior in exilio.* (FUNK-HEMMER. *Hist. de l'Eglise* I. 450).

An Urban II and a St. Bernard had yet to electrify Europe with their eloquence and example, and launch myriads of crusaders to the conquest of the sacred East. Fervid A' Becket would proudly die for the liberties of his Church at the very foot of the altar, but in the still distant future; and meanwhile, everywhere, on every side, were wars, burnings, murders, savage forays, with reprisals no less savage. But worst of all the men, whom God permitted to rule His Church, were frequently men of ignoble, even scandalous lives. Kings and princes had no scruple in providing for their relatives or dependents by obtaining some rich bishopric or abbacy for them. The sovereign never stopped to inquire if his nominee had the requisite qualities of a pastor; and as a matter of fact his learning, his previous career or his character never weighed in the balance provided he was a *persona grata* to his patron. Often many wealthy benefices were given to the same person, or children of tender years were promoted to the highest ecclesiastical offices, or clerics of inferior rank and blemished reputation purchased their advancement from others as venal as themselves.⁴ Such persons either could not or would not discharge their duties; they used the services of some hireling to represent them before their flocks, while their only anxiety was to enjoy the large revenues accruing to them. Like the wicked servant of the Gospel they turned their thoughts altogether to personal pleasure and aggrandizement, not heeding at all their awful responsibility nor the strict account to be demanded of them. 'Our Lord is long, a coming,' they said. And

⁴ Unimpeachable evidence of these and other abuses is at hand for the following centuries in the letters of St. Peter Damian and the letters and discourses of St. Bernard. For Damian I am indebted to MILMAN. *Hist. of Latin Christianity*, vol. iii, p. 371 seqq. Of St. Bernard's writings I have a first hand knowledge. See, then, in particular, Epist. 182; Epist. 290, a shocking requisitory against a certain Cardinal Jordanus. See the entire treatise *De Moribus et officio Episcoporum*. Migne vol. 182, coll. 809-834. See the terrible paragraph in a sermon: *Ministri Christi sunt, et serviunt Antichristo. . . . Inde is quem quotidie vides meretricius nitor, histerionicus habitus, regius habitus. . . . Pro hujusmodi volunt esse et sunt ecclesiarum praepositi, decani, archidiaconi, episcopi, archiepiscopi. In cantica. Sermo XXXIII, no. 1093. Migne vol. 183, vol. 959. There are numerous passing shafts of satire and reprobation in the *De Consideratione*. "Italica rapacitas" lib. III, cap. 1, no. 5; quid de populo loquar? Populus Romanus est. Nec brevius potui, nec expressius tamen aperire de tuis parochianis quod sentio. Ibid. lib. IV, cap. 2, no. 2. Qui non de dote viduae, et patrimonio Crucifixi se vel suos ditare festinent. lib. IV, c. 4, n. 12.*

then they began to strike the men-servants and the 'maid-servants and to eat and to drink and be drunk'... (Luke XII, 45). Even the Chair of St. Peter itself was not pure from this abominable trafic. During the first half of the tenth century the Roman Senator Theophylact, his wife and daughters were all-powerful in Rome, and too often they succeeded in raising a creature of their own to the Apostolic See. Four Popes of blemished reputation owed their advancement to the unscrupulous manoeuvres of this infamous family; and two of these Popes, John XI and John XII were respectively son and grandson of Marozia, *Senatrix et Patricia Roma*, Theophylact's terrible daughter.⁵

What Cardinal Newman says of the days of the Renaissance and the times of St. Philip Neri is equally true, perhaps even more true of the tenth century and the ages of iron. "Never as then, were her [the Church's] rulers, some in higher, some in lower degree, so near compromising what can never be compromised, never so near denying in private life what they taught in public, and undoing by their lives what they professed with their mouths; never were they so mixed up with vanity, so tempted by pride, so haunted by concupiscence; never breathed they so tainted an atmosphere, or were kissed by such traitorous friends, or were subjected to such sights of shame, or were clad in such blood-stained garments." (*Sermons on Various Occasions*. "The Missions of St. Philip.") Nor ought these or any similar scandals surprise us when we recollect the extraordinary frailty of human nature. If amongst the very Apostles themselves there was a Judas, amongst the Deacons a Nicholas, and a Simon Magus amongst the Neophytes—if close friendship and daily intimacy with Jesus Christ far from securing against sin, only made the willing sinner fall more grievously, how can we wonder that in the long course of ages the Church has to lament the deplorable lives of many of her children, from whom, regard being had to their age, dignity and position, she had a right to expect the holiest and highest things?

But it is precisely at the time when things appear at their worst, when our Lord seems to be asleep in Peter's boat, and the

⁵ Of this Pontiff elected Pope Dec. 16, 955 at the age of eighteen, BARRY does not hesitate to say: "In his scarlet mantle Elagabalus occupied St. Peter's Chair." *Papal Monarchy*, p. 160.

powers of evil rage around it in untrammelled malice, that God stretches forth His omnipotent hand to quell the tempest, that He raises up some great servant and champion of His to hearten and uplift His people. In the sixteenth century out of families noted for their wickedness God drew two great saints, St. Francis Borgia and St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi; and similarly out of the violence and ignorance, the bloodshed and vice of the tenth century, God drew the great scholar and thinker, who was one day to rule His Church, and whose life-story we have undertaken to unfold briefly.

Somewhere between 940 and 950 Gerbert, the future Sylvester II, was born at Aurillac in the province of Auvergne in France. His parents were only poor peasants, and at a very early age they took their child to the neighboring Benedictine Abbey to be reared up and suitably educated.⁶ Here he became a prime favorite with the Abbot Gerald, and was the show pupil of a monk called Raimund, who admired the indefatigable thirst for knowledge and fervent piety of the lad, and spared no pains to make a thorough scholar of him. The fierce intellectual energy that breathes through the letter from which we quoted in the beginning, the determination to make new acquisitions of knowledge every day, already manifested itself in the poor little boy just acquiring the rudiments. While Gerbert was still studying at Aurillac a Spanish nobleman, Count Borel of Barcelona, chanced to visit the monastery, and at his departure the youthful prodigy went in his train. In the tenth century the Moorish schools of Spain were already famous, particularly for their prowess in mathematics, and Gerbert, who was a born geometer, embraced eagerly the opportunity of imbibing all their lore. During his stay in Spain he studied at Barcelona, and also, it would seem, under Arab teachers at Seville and Cordova, and made unusual progress in mechanics and natural science. Because of his acquaintance with these recondite themes, then practically unknown in Western Europe, and also on account of some marvellous mechanical inventions—for instance an organ driven by steam—that he was credited with, the future Pope was dub-

⁶ *Isque Gerbertus oriundus e Gallis exstitit, minorum etiam gerens pro-sapiam, sed tamen ingeniis acerrimus, artiumque liberalium studiis plenissime instructus. Notitia apud Migne, Patr. Lat. vol. 139, col. 58.*

bed a necromancer, and it was gravely asserted that he had entered into a compact with the devil, bartering his salvation for high worldly estate and unholy knowledge.⁷ From Spain he was brought to Rome by Bishop Hatto of Vich, who made him his chaplain, and there he attracted the notice of Pope John XIII, who recommended him to the Emperor Otho I. Otho in his turn commended the young savant to Adalbero, Archbishop of Rheims, and the prelate, who measured his man at a glance, was glad to appoint Gerbert professor in the budding university of his diocese. For ten years and more Gerbert taught at Rheims, and at Tours, Flourey and Sens as well. He interrupted his teaching for a short time in 963 to become abbot of Bobbio in Northern Italy. But the monks and their ways did not please him, and he was glad after a brief interval to resume his professorship. At Rheims his talents and the friendship of Emperor Otho assured him a European reputation, and scholars flocked from all parts to assist at his lectures. An enthusiastic disciple, Richer of Rheims,⁸ has left a glowing account of Gerbert's teaching, and it must be admitted that considering the times in which he lived—*dura et miserenda tempora*—he calls them—the range of his knowledge was little short of encyclopedic. Among the classical authors he expounded at Rheims were Terence, Vergil, Horace, Lucan, Persius, Juvenal and Statius. He is familiar with Sallust, Caesar and Suetonius, but his friend of predilection is Cicero. It has been conjectured that the preservation of Cicero's speeches, from which he quotes frequently, has been largely due

⁷ Ipse Gerbertus fecit arte mechanica horologium et organa hydraulica, ubi mirum in modum per *aquae calefactae violentiam*, implet ventus emergens concavitatem barbiti, et per multos foratilis tractus aereae fistulae modulatos clamores emittunt. VINCENT, BELLOC, *Spec. Hist.* XXIV, c. 98.

(2) Ipsum Hispali artes magicas et necromantiam didicisse, daemonem familiarem habuisse.....et alia absurda et inepta Benno pseudocardinalis et schismaticus auctor commentus est, et scriptis mandavit. NATAL, ALEX. apud Migne, vol. 139, col. 57.

It is worth remarking that similar fables were bruited abroad about a later Pope, who had also a strong bent towards science. This was John XXI (1276-1277), who in his earlier life had been a doctor, had written works on medicine and also *Summulae Logicales*, which maintained its place for three hundred years as the standard text-book on Logic.

⁸ Fervebat studiis, numerusque discipulorum in dies accrescebat. Nomen etiam tanti doctoris ferebatur non solum per Gallias, sed etiam per Germaniae populos delatabatur. Transitque per Alpes, ac diffunditur in Italiam, usque Thirrenum et Adriaticum. Migne vol. 138, col. 105.

to Gerbert. He advises a friend, who is about to travel, to bring Cicero's orations with him, and he wants for himself a complete copy of Tully's *pro rege Deiotaro*. He asks another friend to collect MSS for him in Italy, and in particular to procure copies of Boethius and Victorinus with the *Ophthalmicus* of Demosthenes.⁹ He is very anxious also to obtain MSS of Caesar, Pliny, Suetonius and Symmachus. He tells a correspondent that he is forming a library with the aid of MSS from Germany, Belgium and Rome, and he asks for transcripts from France as well. In his desire to acquire the ancient learning he is just as eager as a humanist of the Renaissance, and he need not fear a comparison with Politian or Bembo on that score.¹⁰

In philosophy he explained Porphyry's Introduction as translated by Victorinus and commented by Boethius; the *De Interpretatione* and *Categories* of Aristotle in Latin versions; and Boethius on the *Topics* of Cicero. There is still extant a short philosophical treatise of his entitled *De Rationali et Ratione Uti*, wherein for the benefit of his pupil Otho III, he reconciles an apparent contradiction between the *Categories* of Aristotle and Porphyry's Introduction. We abstain from analyzing this treatise, because the point involved is a subtle one and devoid of interest to present-day readers.¹¹ In mathematics, which were practically re-introduced into France by Gerbert, he had to break new ground and make his own text-book. This very curious treatise on Mathematics, now close on a thousand years old, may be found by the inquisitive in Migne *Patr. Lat.* vol. 139 coll. 94-154. Its opening chapters are concerned with definitions, explanations of symbols, the properties of numbers and figures. Some of Euclid's propositions occur further on; but the major portion of the work is concerned with finding the area of figures and fields, the heights of mountains, the widths

⁹ Age, ergo et te solo conscio. fac ut mihi scribantur M. Manlius de Astrologia, Victorinus de Rhetorica, Demosthenes Ophthalmicus. Ep. 130. The Demosthenes in question is not the famous orator, but an Alexandrian Doctor of Nero's days.

¹⁰ Bibliothecam assidue comparo et sicut Romae dudum ac in aliis partibus Italiae, in Germania quoque et Belgica, Scriptores auctorumque exemplaria multitudinem redemi, adjutis benevolentia ac studiis amicorum. Sic. apud vos per vos fieri sinite ut exorem. Ep. 44.

¹¹ *De Rationali et Ratione uti*, apud Migne, vol. 139, coll. 159-168. HAU-REAU, (*Phil. Scolastique* vol. i, chap. vii) analyses Gerbert's treatise at considerable length, calling it: *ce petit livre vraiment philosophique*.

of rivers, and such like questions, which are generally considered the province of Mensuration or Trigonometry today. In this treatise numerous Greek words and terms occur, and this is an index that Gerbert had some knowledge of Greek, although such an accomplishment was almost unknown in Western Europe at that time. And there are other indices, slight ones it is true, but they seem to point to the same conclusion. Bobbio, where Gerbert was abbot for a while possessed some Greek MSS, and he was the very man to utilize all the opportunities of knowledge that came his way. Moreover Greek was likely to be spoken at the Court of the Othos, for the mother of the third Otho was a Byzantine princess, and a chance phrase of this Emperor's in a letter to his former tutor would seem to imply that Gerbert numbered Greek also among his other accomplishments¹². However that may be, enough has been said to show the many-sided culture of the man, and that all the learning of his time was in his possession. In the middle ages the entire curriculum of human science was contained in the *trivium* and *quadrivium*. The trivium with which ordinary mortals were content included Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric. The quadrivium attempted only by advanced students comprised Music, Arithmetic, Geometry and Astronomy.¹³

Now if this vast erudition is entirely to the honour of Gerbert, it must redound also, as Pez remarks, to the credit of the age in which he lived. For after all, a professor could not expound to thronging groups of students lore which they were incapable of comprehending; and if for many years Gerbert taught classics and mathematics and philosophy and astronomy to large numbers, it is evident his scholars must have appreciated and assimilated his teaching, and it would seem to follow also that the intellectual level of the 10th century was not as low as certain writers would have us suppose.¹⁴ As a matter of

¹² Deposcimus ut Graecorum vivax ingenium suscitetis, et nos arithmeticae librum edoceatis. Ep. 187.

¹³ The memorial couplet that commemorates the Seven Arts is interesting:

GRAM loquitur; DIA vera docet: Rhet verba colorat;

MUS canit: AR numerat; GE ponderat; AST colit astra.

¹⁴ Interim vel ex hoc Gerberti libro de Geometria satis intelligi potest disciplinas mathematicas aliasque egregias artes saeculo X nequaquam adeo jacuisse, ut quidam recentes scriptores finxerunt. Migne, vol. 139, col. 91.

fact Gerbert knew how to inspire his pupils with his own love of learning; two of them at least were able to carry on his work after he was gone, and make names for themselves in the annals of scholarship, Richer of Rheims already referred to, and Fulbert (+1029), bishop of Chartres and founder of its famous school.

But Gerbert's activities while teaching at Rheims extended beyond the classroom; he had also a large share in the ecclesiastical and national movements of the period. He was secretary and adviser to Archbishop Adalbero, he maintained a constant correspondence with the court of the Othos, and he helped to raise Hugh Capet to the throne of France, whom the metropolitan of Rheims crowned Jan. 23rd 988. A few months later Adalbero died, and it was his dying wish that Gerbert should be his successor. The latter according to himself did not want the dignity, neither did the powers that be want him, for King Hugh intervened to obtain the see for a certain Arnulf, a descendant of Charlemagne. Arnulf showed scant gratitude to his patron, for he soon became involved in treasonable practices, and was also accused of grave canonical irregularities. Hugh Capet referred the case to Rome, and sent ambassadors to demand the deposition of the perfidious prelate. It would appear that the King's request met with an adverse or at least a temporizing reply. Rome refrained from proceeding against Arnulf until better informed. But King Hugh, the founder of the Capet dynasty, displayed in the infancy of his house's greatness, that arbitrary and despotic spirit, which became more pronounced in his successors. Like the *Grand Monarque* he was determined to be King and Pope within his own dominions and in a council of French bishops and abbots held in the monastery of St. Basolus at Rheims, Arnulf was deposed at the king's instigation, July 17th 991, and Gerbert elected in his place. The latter feared and dreaded the proffered honour¹⁵ foreseeing the difficulties in store for him. Nor were his gloomy prognostics without receiving a speedy fulfillment. The various political

¹⁵ Excluso itaque illo (Arnulf) ab Remensi ecclesia mihi reluctanti Multumque ea quae passus sum et adhuc patior formidanti, a fratribus meis Galliarum episcopis hos onus sacerdotii sub divini nominis obtestatione impositum est. Migne, vol. 139 col. 196.

parties distracting France at that time made Gerbert's post a difficult and dangerous one; his own unsullied morals and austere life were a constant reproach to the loose and the lukewarm; and then worst of all there was the congenital vice and irregularity of his appointment; for many thought that Archbishop Arnulf had been cruelly treated, and they could not look upon the new prelate as anything better than an intruder, since the Pope had not passed sentence and Arnulf had never been canonically deposed. Even the German court in spite of its constant friendliness for Gerbert seems to have taken this view, and Emperor Otho was one of those who petitioned John XV to send a legate to France to decide the affair. Abbot Leo was chosen as the Pope's representative, and furnished with full powers to finally judge the case. In a first synod held on June 2nd 995 Gerbert was temporarily suspended; in a subsequent assembly held on July 1st 995 Arnulf's deposition and Gerbert's promotion were both declared invalid. The prelate was deeply mortified at the humiliation put upon him, though the decision was strictly in accordance with the canons of the Church, and for a time he half contemplated resistance to the legate's ruling. Moreover, under the sting of his disappointment and resentment he permitted himself to make ill-advised statements and utter subversive theories, which afterwards as Pope he deemed it proper to withdraw.¹⁶ But if the first emotions of wounded pride and indignation impelled the irate scholar to revolt, cooler reflection soon convinced him that submission was the wiser and more edifying course. Profoundly mortified at what he considered unjust treatment, he retired to the court of Germany and became preceptor to the third Otho, then a youth of fifteen or sixteen years of age. Obedience in this case was soon crowned with that conspicuous reward, which is cynically called, owing to its rarity, poetic justice. If Gerbert quietly relinquished the primatial See of France at the bidding of his

¹⁶Gerbert par ABBÉ QUEANT, pp. 170 seqq. Sylvester II was not the only Pope whose maturer judgment repented of his earlier acts. Pius II (Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini 1458-1464) in his famous Bull of Retraction also disavowed the writings and actions of his chequered youth. "Follow that which we now say; believe the old man rather than the youth; do not esteem the layman more highly than the Pope; cast away Aeneas; hold fast to Pius." PASTOR, *Hist. of the Popes*, III, p. 284 (Eng. Trans.)

superior, if he preferred to lose rank and position rather than be guilty of rebellion, he was soon indemnified for his temporary disgrace by advancement to the patriarchal Chair of Ravenna, and just a few months later he assumed the tiara of Supreme Pontiff. As Pope looking back on the ups and downs of his extraordinary career, realizing perhaps too, how near he had been to a great and irreparable fall and ultimate failure, he wrote the curious line of punning allusion, which is not without a strain of melancholy:—

Scandit ab R, Gerbertus in R, post PaPa vigens R.
Gerbertus climbs from R to R,
And now as Pope he reigns at R.

The three Rs were Rheims, Ravenna and Rome.

As the evening of life closed down on the old man, as death removed his friends and favorite pupils, when ungrateful Rome revolted and drove him out, as though he were a tyrant and usurper, must he not sometimes have regretted his peaceful professor's chair, the bloodless tourneys of the classroom, the eager pupils attentive to his every word—those successive generations of young men, full of all the graces and charms and possibilities of youth, whom he had taught to do and dare and dream of great things? Must he not sometimes have yearned for their warm loyalty, and whole-souled regard, and thorough-going, downright championship amidst the treason and instability and deceit that best him? History does not say so, for history does not often render a personal, intimate, appealing note, but surely we cannot be far wrong in supposing it.

In 996 the young Otho set out for Rome to receive the imperial crown. At Ravenna he was met by a deputation of the clergy, senate and people informing him of the sudden death of John XV and promising to respect his wishes in the choice of a successor to the deceased Pope. At his suggestion his cousin Bruno, son of the duke of Carinthia, was elected and took the name of Gregory V. This pontiff was the first German to occupy the chair of St. Peter. After a few months spent in Italy the Emperor returned home, but Gerbert remained behind and in 998 was appointed by Gregory himself archbishop of

Ravenna. Next year, February 18th, 999, the Pope died, and Gerbert through Otho's influence was elected his successor. The name he assumed, Sylvester II, was not without its significance. A Sylvester it was who ruled the Church when Constantine gave it lasting peace; Sylvester and Constantine stood side by side in propagating the hitherto proscribed and persecuted faith, in building churches, in collecting the bones and embellishing the tombs of the martyrs; and Sylvester too was said to have received large temporal domains in Italy from the gratitude and piety of the first Christian Emperor. Did Gerbert fondly hope that he would play the part of a new Sylvester to a new Constantine? Did he gloriously dream and plan that he and his royal pupil, one in soul, would unite the forces of Church and State for the greater glory of God, and almost realize the millenium on a regenerated earth? His assumption of such a very pregnant name, and one unknown in papal annals for seven hundred years, would lead one to suppose it. But his high hopes and ardent day-dreams, if he had them, were doomed to disappointment. Greatness did not bring him happiness; power, in his case, was not crowned with achievement. He found that the unfortunate circumstances of the time, the animosity of the Romans towards him, and the swift approach of death were more than able to paralyze his own worthy projects and high endeavours, and the powerful protection of the Emperor.

One of his first acts was to confirm his old rival Archbishop Arnulf in the See of Rheims. And he had also the magnanimity and the loyalty to admit that his own conduct in that intricate and delicate affair had not been altogether free from approach.¹⁷

In the matrimonial affairs of King Robert of France he maintained unflinchingly the discipline of the Church, and compelled the King to send his mistress away. He established an archbishopric at Gnesen for Poland, and one at Gran for Hungary. A very eloquent discourse of his preserved in Migne *Patr. Lat.* vol. 139, Coll. 169-178, on the "Formation of Bishops"

¹⁷ Tibi Arnulfo Remensi archiepiscopo quibusdam excessibus pontificali honore privato subvenire dignum duximus, ut quia tua abdicatio Romane assensu caruit, Momanae pietatis munere credaris posse reparari. Migne, vol. 139, col. 273.

Unde et reatus conscientiae meminit. *Ibidem.* col. 59.

shows the high ideal he had of the pastoral office, and how deeply he deplored evils and abuses which he was powerless to remedy.

But Sylvester's days and those of his imperial pupil were numbered. A revolt drove Pope and Emperor out of Rome in the winter of 1001, and the pontiff was unable to re-enter the city for several months. Early the next year, January 22nd, 1002, Emperor Otho died, by poison it was believed in the twenty-second year of his age. And little more than a twelve month later, May 12th, 1003, Sylvester himself passed away.

Sylvester II, the first Frenchman to occupy St. Peter's Chair, was a foreigner to Italy, one of these "barbarian Pontiffs," as the Italians say, whom the Romans do not love, and to whom they have ever shown a wavering and grudging loyalty. It is tempting to compare him—and the parallel is a close one—with the last *pontifice barbaro*, who occupied the papal throne, Adrian VI (1522-1523). Both were men of learning, notable writers and thinkers intellectually in advance of their time. Adrian for years had been a distinguished professor of Louvain University, Gerbert was considered the most learned man of the tenth century. Both were men of stainless lives and irreproachable characters, who were saddened and disgusted at the license, indifference and self-seeking around them. Both at a distance of five hundred years were tutors to a Roman Emperor and a German Kaiser, Gerbert to Otho III, Adrian to Charles V. The reigns of both were short, too brief to realize their noble projects, their deep and far-reaching schemes. Both would seem to have fallen on lamentable times, and unreliable co-workers—to have been unjustly detested, wrongly judged, terribly misunderstood, and to both applies equally well the striking and quaint epitaph placed on Adrian's tomb by his friend and countryman Cardinal Enckenvoert, "Alas the best of men are often born in times unsuited to their virtues!"

Proh Dolor! Quantum refert in quae tempora vel optimi cujusque virtus incidat!

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